

6.8 SCENIC HIGHWAYS

6.8.1 Introduction

The Scenic Highways Element is an optional General Plan element authorized by Section 65303 of the Government Code. The Scenic Highways Element is intended to establish and protect highways with scenic value, be they State or County roads.

Definitions

The term "scenic highways," as used in this element, refers to any freeway, highway, road, street, boulevard, or other vehicular right-of-way which traverses an area of unusual scenic quality as indicated on Figure SH-1. An "official scenic highway" is a scenic highway which has been designated by the State of California, according to procedures which are administered by the State Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

The visible land area outside the actual right-of-way is generally described as the "viewshed" or the "scenic corridor." The corridor encompasses the land easily visible from the highway. Depending on topography and air quality, the physical dimensions of the corridor may vary considerably.

It is the visual quality of the man-made or natural environments within a scenic corridor that are responsible for its scenic value. Commonly, the physical limits of a scenic corridor are broken down into foreground views (zero to one quarter mile) and distant views (over one quarter mile). In addition to distinct foreground and distant views, the visual quality of a scenic corridor is defined by special features, which include:

- Focal points - prominent natural or man-made features which immediately catch the eye.
- Transition areas - locations where the visual environment changes dramatically.
- Gateways - locations which mark the entrance to a community or geographic area.

6.8.2 Findings

Because Shasta County contains two major river valleys, the Sacramento and the Fall; and three major mountain ranges, the Coast, Klamath, and Cascade; its scenic resources are both varied and remarkable. Virtually every highway in Shasta County is a scenic highway. However, some scenic highways are more important than others based on the visual quality of their scenic corridors, the degree to which highways are used, and vulnerability of corridors to degradation of visual quality.

Value of Scenic Corridors

Scenic corridors make major contributions to the quality of life enjoyed by the residents of Shasta County. The development of community pride, the enhancement of property values, and the protection of aesthetically-pleasing open spaces reflecting a preference for the rural lifestyle are all ways in which scenic corridors are valuable to County residents.

Scenic highways and their associated corridors also strengthen the tourist industry of Shasta County. For many visitors, highway corridors will provide their only experience of Shasta County. Enhancement and protection of these corridors ensures that the tourist experience continues to be a positive one and, consequently, provides support for the tourist-related activities of the County's economy.

Scenic Corridor Issues

In order to ensure present and future protection of the County's scenic environment, unsightly land uses which impair the visual quality of official scenic highways should be controlled. Undesirable land uses might include construction of large buildings or facilities, various types of large unscreened outdoor storage areas, non-landscaped parking lots, and the siting of billboards or other off-premise signs. These activities tend to conflict with the surrounding natural environment and restrict views of distant features such as mountains and lakes.

Shasta County is fortunate in that current land uses along its scenic highways rarely conflict with the visual quality of associated corridors. This is largely due to the fact that current preferences for the rural lifestyle in many areas of the County have resulted in a development pattern which for the most part respects natural features and landscapes. However, the rapid pace of development experienced throughout the County during the latter part of the 1980s could present certain threats to visual quality along some of the County's major corridors.

Future impact of development on visual resources along official scenic highways will depend primarily upon decisions regarding the type, design, and siting of future land uses. The General Plan should therefore provide for the continued protection and enhancement of official scenic highways.

A major objective in planning for the protection and enhancement of scenic highways should be the achievement of a balance between different users of scenic corridors. While scenic highways and their associated viewsheds offer visual amenities for those who travel there, the value and importance of scenic corridors for those who live and work along them extends beyond visual significance.

Prime examples of potentially-conflicting interests are the motorist and the resource manager (timberland owner or agriculturalist). Many resource management activities, such as clear cutting on timberlands or brush burning for grazing land improvement purposes, create adverse visual impact along scenic highways. Considering the "life" of a scenic highway, however, these impacts are minimal; clear cut areas are reseeded and blackened fields quickly return to their natural states. Natural resource management activities such as timbering and agriculture are uses which contribute to the long-term beauty of a scenic corridor and should not be precluded along scenic highways based on short-term adverse impacts.

Approaches to Protecting Scenic Corridors

There are two approaches to the protection and enhancement of scenic highways:

County Level

The primary mechanism available for scenic highways protection at the County level is the land use plan, that section of the General Plan which guides commercial, residential, and industrial land uses and densities. In order to be an effective tool in official scenic highway and corridor preservation, the land use plan should reflect a balance between resource protection and community desires.

Additional means by which the visual quality of official scenic highways can be preserved are through use of design review guidelines regarding the siting and design of new structures within scenic corridors. These guidelines can be used to direct new development in such a way as to maximize harmony with the scenic resources and minimize negative impacts on a corridor's visual quality.

State Level

In 1963, the California State Legislature established the California Scenic Highway Program (SB 1467) in recognition of the desirability of preserving scenic corridors for the enjoyment of future generations. Passage of this bill gave the State of California Department of Transportation (CALTRANS) the responsibilities of administering and coordinating a scenic highways program and of officially designating State and County highways as scenic highways. The following steps describing the procedures for obtaining official status as a scenic highway by a local agency are listed as follows:

- 1) Request by the local agency for inclusion of its specific highway in The Master Plan of State Highways Eligible for Official Scenic Highway Designation.
- 2) Submittal by the local agency to the District Director of Transportation of a resolution of intent to initiate the designation process. The resolution of intent must be accompanied by a contour map of the suggested scenic corridor boundaries and route limits, a brief description of the roadway with respect to its surrounding area, and an inventory of elements that make the routes scenic, i.e., facts of historical significance, vistas, topography, stands of trees, rock outcrops, etc.

The specific plan and program guidelines require that the protection program take:

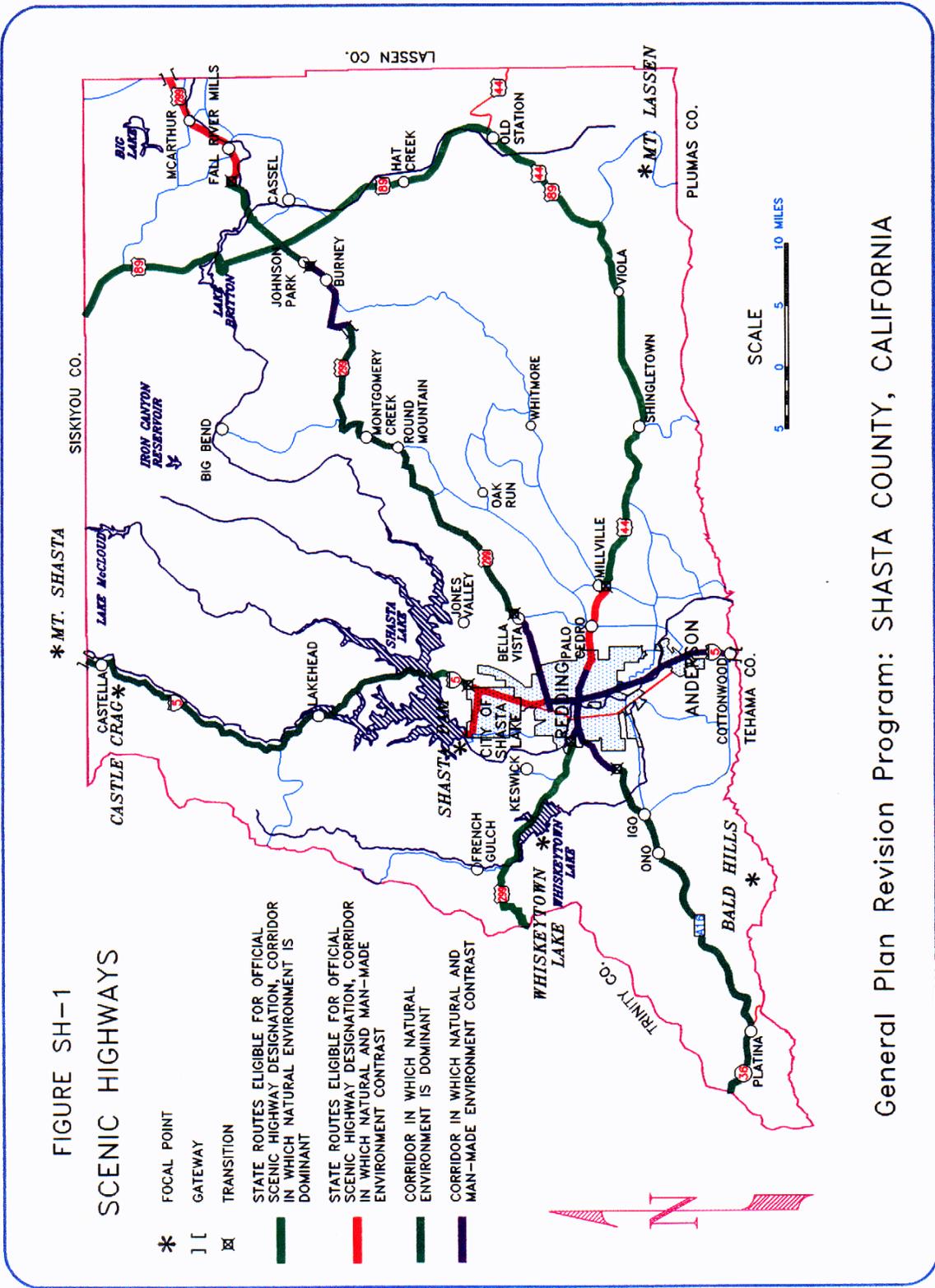
... such action as may be necessary to protect the scenic appearance of the scenic corridor, the band of land generally adjacent to the highway right-of-way, including but not limited to 1) regulation of land use and intensity (density) of development; 2) detailed land and site planning; 3) control of outdoor advertising; 4) careful attention to, and control of earthmoving and landscaping; and 5) the design and appearance of structures and equipment." (Streets and Highways Code, Chapter 2, Article 2., Section 261.)

If the local jurisdiction's program is satisfactory, the CALTRANS Director will designate the highway as an official scenic highway. The highway will then be identified by State scenic route signs ("poppy" signs) and included on State maps distributed throughout California. In September 1981, the portion for Shasta Dam Boulevard west from Lake Boulevard received official State designation as a scenic highway.

Potential Scenic Corridors

Interest has been shown for obtaining official scenic highway designation for the stretch of Interstate 5 north of Shasta Lake to the Oregon border. This corridor is one of the most spectacular scenic routes in Northern California. Along this corridor are outstanding views of Shasta Lake, the Sacramento River Canyon, Castle Crags, and Mount Shasta. Continuing efforts may be made to incorporate this segment of I-5 into the State's Master Plan for officially designated highways.

There has also been interest in designating the corridor along Highway 89 from Interstate 5 to Lassen Park as a scenic highway.



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The General Plan Approach

The appropriate approach for official scenic highway corridor protection in Shasta County should incorporate State and County level protection measures. The amount of protection should be tailored to balance the need for scenic corridor protection, based on resource value, with the County's demand for corridor preservation.

As all routes vary in terms of viewshed quality and protection needs, it would be impractical to develop County land use plan policies which address all existing situations. Therefore, at the County level, administrative guidelines should be developed which would direct new development in such a way as to minimize land use conflicts while maximizing potential scenic value along the corridor. The administrative guidelines system should be general enough to apply to any combination of land use and resource characteristic, yet specific enough to provide the degree of protection necessary and desirable for preservation of the scenic corridor. Guidelines should regulate new development along official scenic corridors in terms of allowable land uses and densities, development siting, grading activities, outdoor storage areas, parking lots, structural design and landscaping. Outdoor advertising guidelines, both on- and off-premise, should also be developed and applied where necessary for scenic corridor protection.

Requests to the State Department of Transportation for official designation of State scenic highways should be submitted when necessary and desired by the County.

6.8.3 Objectives

- SH-1 Protection of the natural scenery along the official scenic highways of Shasta County from new development which would diminish the aesthetic value of the scenic corridor.
- SH-2 New development along scenic corridors of the official scenic highway should be designed to relate to the dominant character of the corridor (natural or natural and man-made contrast) or of a particular segment of the corridor. Relationships shall be achieved in part through regulations concerning building form, site location, and density of new development.
- SH-3 Recognition that the management practices of agriculture, timber, and other resource-based industries which may cause some degradation of the visual quality of the scenic corridor are inevitable but their impacts are temporary.

6.8.4 Policies

- SH-a To protect the value of the natural and scenic character of the official scenic highway corridors and the County gateways dominated by the natural environment, the following provisions, along with the County development standards, shall govern new development:
 - setback requirements
 - regulations of building form, material, and color
 - landscaping with native vegetation, where possible
 - minimizing grading and cut and fill activities

- requiring use of adequate erosion and sediment control programs
- siting of new structures to minimize visual impacts from highway
- regulation of the type, size, and location of advertising signs
- utility lines shall be underground wherever possible; where undergrounding is not practical, lines should be sited in a manner which minimizes their visual intrusion.

SH-b The type, size, design, and placement of signs within an official corridor shall be compatible with the visual character of the immediate surroundings. The County's sign regulations should be redrafted for the following locations:

- timberlands and forest areas
- croplands and grazing lands
- rural community centers
- urban and town centers
- recreational uses

SH-c Official scenic highways should include vista sites, turnouts, restrooms, picnic grounds, travel information, and other related facilities/services.